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ABSTRACT

The three children who are the focus of this paper emerged from analysis of KS2 (Key Stage 2, ages 7 to 11 years) writing during the Kirklees Writing Project. This involved a group of six KS2 teachers bringing samples of students' work to evaluation meetings in which key factors of a particular genre were identified and differences in children's performances discussed. One of the genres discussed was autobiography, and the six participants had brought in a wide range of texts. The work of one group of students stood out from that of the rest. Instead of the usual photocopied pages of an exercise book with a few minimalist illustrations, one teacher had brought a colorful selection of handmade books, each with a decorative laminated cover, illustrating key themes from the fragments of the autobiographies which the students had assembled. These children, close friends, had created a small publishing company to produce regular editions of a graphic magazine. Of course these Kirklees' children's collaborative writing venture is out of the ordinary, but the urge to write collaboratively and in doing so create an imaginary world in itself is not. All three children have maintained an interest in their school written work as well as their home productions, and as with the autobiographies, they have been enabled to incorporate elements of their personal interests into more school-based tasks. The response of teachers in the Kirklees project has been to focus on what children bring of themselves to writing and to incorporate in their planning opportunities for different modes of meaning-making which include drama, graphic representation, and the exploration of "creative" or "poetic" writing forms within the framework. The project's next stage will report on the effectiveness of the strategies they adopt. (Contains 29 references.) (NKA)

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In the Steps of the Brontës:
A Case Study of Three Children's Writing from Home to School at KS2

Paper to be presented to BERA Annual Conference Leeds, September 2001

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A Prologue to Writing

The young man, sprawling on the rug, gazes intently a large book of black and white illustrations. With complete absorption and deliberate concentration, he selects a well-sharpened, indigo pencil from his Lakeland tin and painstakingly executes a tracery of fine lines. Next, having chosen a contrasting leaf green shade, he fills in the background area, just as carefully. Previous pages are already completed in bold shades of carmine, ochre and fuchsia, testifying both to his skill and the seriousness with which he takes the task in hand. He is twenty-three years old, in the final year of medical school and committing to memory the complex, anatomical structures of the human body, in preparation for an examination. The book, which has now held his attention for a whole week, is The Anatomy Coloring Book, (Kapit and Elson, 1993). It is both a standard medical text and a best seller, constructed with a clear, educative purpose. Its preface gives brief, but precise instructions to the student on how it should be completed:

> A glance at the front or back cover will illustrate the basic principle of this coloring format: each "title" (a term in colourable outline letters) followed by a small, lettered subscript should receive a different color. After coloring the title, you should then search through the illustration(s) and color any structure identified with that subscript, using the same color as the title. Unless you run out of colours, you should not repeat that color for any other subscripted title or structure. Occasionally, title subscripts will appear with a numbered superscript, e.g., A1, A2, and so on. These titles and related structures get the same color because of the strong relationship between the structures.
> ((Kapit and Elson, 1993: ix)

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It is a form of colouring by numbers which will enable my son (for that is the identity of the nameless young man) to commit to memory complex structures more practically than by means of strings of words which were the mnemonics of an earlier generation of medics. Later, as he completes his surgical training as Senior House Officer, the graphic maps he has retained from this industry will be more useful in helping him to identify the actual muscles, tendons and joints on which he is working, than any textual description could be. Although it would be difficult to prove, my son's skill in colouring anatomical illustrations might be traced back to the pleasure he had taken as a much younger pupil in illustrating his writing with his own drawings or colouring in those provided by his teachers.

The Power of Pictures

Illustrations and images are a powerful element of medical education where diagnostic signs need to be recognised on sight. Moreover, before the age of colour photography and digital reproduction, illustrators, in major teaching hospitals were employed to record those rarer syndromes, which most students might not be expected to encounter in the course of their medical education. See, for example, *Delineations of Cutaneous Diseases, exhibiting the characteristic appearances of the principal genera and species comprised in the classification of the late Dr Willan and completing the series of engravings made by that author* (Bateman, 1828). Such plates collated in medical atlases, are not supplements to an academic text but central to the construction of knowledge and are usually created by, or in collaboration with, a medical specialist, such as Dr Willan, noted in the title of the skin book. Nor is it only in medicine where pictures have played a powerful role in aiding identification of key diagnostic details and in shaping knowledge. Illustration has been integral to the production of books from their earliest manifestations. *The Eyewitness Guide to Writing* traces examples from the 'Egyptian Book of the Dead', through mediaeval manuscripts, to Caxton's printing of *Chaucer's Canterbury Tales* (Brookfield, 1993:48). Drawings and diagrams are central to helping the reader focus on specific textual details, stimulating interest either by adding new or elaborating existing

textual information. As Vincent (2000) notes of eighteenth and nineteenth century literature:

> The texts of the chapbooks… were adorned with illustrations, ranging from the crude woodcuts on the covers of the wares of the chapmen and colporteurs to the elaborate lithographs on the pages of the newspapers and periodical fiction of the later nineteenth century, which provided points of entry for those unable to cope with the accompanying lines of print, and clues or confirmation for those still uncertain of their abilities. It may indeed be argued that the hybrid forms of popular print provided not only an incentive to learn the alphabet, but far more effective primers for the barely literate than the specialise textbooks which the professional pedagogues were producing for the official elementary schools.
> (Vincent, 2000, p.96)

Vincent's analysis, however, works to support a notion, still prevalent in much early schooling and basic education that pictures are important only as an aid for those unable to cope with the complexity of the printed word. Olson (1994) makes a very different case. By demonstrating the profound influence exercised by graphic forms of language over the spoken word he has cogently argued for the role of illustration in constructing, rather than replicating knowledge, particularly in relation to botanical illustration in herbals:

> The seventeenth-century representations we have surveyed, whether in Dutch art, in cartography, or in natural history, indeed the very attempt at representation, yielded a new understanding of the world. In the case of herbals we noted that the improved drawings of plants led to the improvement of verbal descriptions, that is the selection of the critical discriminatory features of the plants themselves. This is not merely putting down what one already knew-almost everyone could, for example, recognise a radish- but of finding the significant features and their relations and articulating them both in words and images so that they could 'provide' a 'world picture' of all plants and so that they became part of the public store of knowledge.
> (Olson, 1994, p 232)

Schooled literacy: a hypologocenticism?

Our current system of schooling remains focused on the written word, within a curriculum, or framework which largely confines school pupils to the construction of meaning through the medium of the text. French deconstructionalists, notably Jacques Derrida (1976, 1978) arguing for the centrality of written language in constructing, rather than reflecting meaning, employed the term logocentrism to explain western culture's privileging of the spoken word (the logos) over written forms. However, what is at stake in representation is the word, whether written or spoken and it is the word that dominates forms of communication in school. By coining the term **hyperlogocentricism** to describe school language, I wish to highlight how the word, largely in written formats dominates communication in the current curricula; all this, at the expense of all other forms of representation, including pictures, diagrams or physically enactive modes, such as play, drama and plastic modelling. The current emphasis of the NLS is on replicating and modelling pre-existing written genres and formats, a trend which is apparent in the rapid proliferation of writing frames. No matter that Wray and Lewis, (1997) the authors of the text on which most frames are based, did not intend their formats to be used as worksheets, it is in this manner that many teachers currently employ their photocopiable resources. Moreover, following pronouncements such as the following from Chris Woodhead, speaking then as the Chief Inspector of schools, teachers feel that colouring, and by extension drawing, has been outlawed from their classes.

> The trouble is that the inspection evidence shows that this ideal (of *child-centred learning*-my italics) is not as widespread as some would have us believe. Weak lessons (and we are talking here of around 20 per cent of the lessons observed) certainly tend to be characterised by a reliance on individualised learning, by the excessive use of worksheets which make little or no intellectual demand upon the child, by time wasted, as I put it in a recent lecture, on "colouring, cutting and pasting".
> (TES, 06/09/1996)

Writing in class

The camera now cuts to a primary classroom, where a group of Y4 children are labouring over a sheet of writing practice. At the top of the page is a series of patterns, designed to give practice in the formation of loops and curves, which is then followed by a set of words to give practice in letter formations, 'root, hoot, shoot, sloop, snoop.' The children proceed to use these words, where appropriate, in a rhyming poem as part of their current writing targets

The teacher explains to me that very little curriculum time can be allowed for 'mindless colouring in' but that those children who finish their writing to her satisfaction in good time can draw a picture. She adds, however:

> Drawing isn't what it's (assessment) all about. They need to write in paragraphs, get their spellings right and punctuate properly. Those are the targets they need to meet, the standards expected in writing.
> KS2 teacher, interviewed October 2000

These filmic memories are in response to the results of a small scale research project conducted into children's writing at KS 2 in which a number of the children, and most notably boys, whose work I had studied, prior to conducting interviews with them explained that they preferred to used drawing as a way of developing key ideas for writing.

> … larger numbers of boys found it harder to get initial ideas for narratives, wrote shorter pieces and often embedded drawings or diagrams within their texts, conceiving graphics more dynamically as part of the overall design. Some preferred drawing as means of getting started in creating meaning and were thwarted by current emphases on completing written work before illustration is permitted. Just as younger children were influenced by their teachers' preoccupations about completing their writing first, these Y5 and Y6 pupils were concerned above all with technical aspects of their work commenting on the need to improve punctuation, spelling and the neatness of their handwriting, rather than ways of communicating ideas more effectively.
> (Millard and Marsh 2001b):

Writing from home to school

The three children, who are the focus of this current paper emerged form the analysis of KS2 writing during he Kirklees Writing Project (Millard and Walsh, 2001). This involved a group of six KS2 teachers bringing samples of pupils' work to twilight evaluation meetings, in which key factors of a particular genre were identified and differences in children's performance discussed. One of the genres discussed by the group was autobiography and the six participants had brought in a wide range of texts. The work of a small group of pupils stood out from those of the rest. Instead of the usual photocopied pages of an exercise book with a few minimalist illustrations, one teacher had brought a colourful selection of hand-made books, each with a decorative laminated cover, illustrating key themes from the fragments of their autobiography which each pupil had assembled.. Each writer had also chosen an individual selection of logos, captions, and illustrations to identify their work. The teacher explained that a popular children's story, *The Story of Tracey Beaker*, by Jacqueline Wilson (1992) had been used a stimulus. This text imitates the writing style of an eleven-year-old girl and incorporates fragments of her diary, letters and schoolwork. Tracey and her friends are also amusingly depicted in the cartoon-like black and white drawings of the illustrator, Nick Sharrat

The work of three Y6 children distracted attention from the analysis of other more closely written texts, spread out on the table The most striking was that of a boy, Alex, whose illustrations for his fragments of autobiography drew heavily on the imagery of popular culture, his writing style clearly influenced by the language of comics, cartoons and computer game. The work of two other children, the twin sisters, Vicki and Anne, displayed similar characteristics.

The energy of the children's writing and the inter-play of image and text reminded me both of contemporary cartoons and comic book stories. I asked their teacher about the children's interest in these forms. I was told that all three were involved at home in the production of a super hero comic, which they brought into school for their classmates to read. I commented to their teacher that their work was of particular interest as it epitomized themes currently being explored within the Sheffield Literacy group where school-based activities, which aim to build upon existing home literacy practices, are a

key aspect of research. Marsh, for example, has written about the motivating effect of using aspects of popular culture such as Media Boxes and comic lending libraries with younger children, (Thompson and Marsh, 2000; Marsh, 2000) whilst Millard (1997) and Millard and Marsh (2001b) have identified the range of semiotic resources pupils bring to the scene of writing, commenting particularly on differences in the cultural capital of boys and girls.

The young writers' teacher further explained that these particular children were close friends and had created for themselves a small publishing company in order to produce regular editions of a graphic magazine named SEPS. This was completed in the twins' home to which Alex was a constant visitor. SEPS had been formed from the names given to four small wooden figures, about 2cms long. They were called Scrabbles, Errol, Piggo and Scibbles. In the light of my strongly expressed interest the children wrote directly to me, enclosing examples of their home produced magazines to read accompanying their work with the following letter of explanation:

> Dear Elaine
>
> Our comic is about three mice on super hero adventures. It contains emotional (dramatic) scenes, fantasy, a sort of horror, funny, but not really bad violence and also lots of mystery. There are a number of posters in the comic.
>
> We wanted to do the comics because we all like reading comics and drawing. I want to be an animator so I did most of the drawings, no, well all of us did a fair share, but it was me who thought of doing the comic **(Vicki)**.
>
> My dad makes wooden vases on a machine called a lathe. He makes the mice, pigs, rats and a hedgehog. He is also just making bulls. I go to my best friend's house they are called Anne and Vicki. Hey! Scabbers get off, Oh fine then you have a go:
>
> Hi I'm Scabbers and I'm a mouse and I go with Alex to Anne and Vicki's to help with the comic. **(Alex and Scabbers)**
>
> Oh, thanks Scabbers! Now back to your letter, Elaine. I just like to say that all of us would like to be comic makers and if you look at the bottom of this letter our mice have something to say **(Anne)**

The publications enclosed with the letter resembled American comic books with stories of Superman or Batman. Some pages were filled by a complete comic strip; in others, a single action dominated a full page. The boy, Alex, drew many of the black and white, cartoon-like strips whilst the girls completed more of the coloured, specialist pages and publicity material, together with competitions and a readers' letter page. They reported spending hours in each other's company outside of school time, creating their stories first through enactment and then in words and pictures. These were marked by vivid language applied to somewhat conventional plots in which a group of small mice battled against destructive villains, represented by cats.

I made several visits to the school during the year and on each occasion found a new edition of this comic circulating in the class They included Halloween, Christmas, and Valentine editions each of which were made up of themed articles and stories. For example, the Valentine edition included a picture narrative called *S♥Ft Centred Scribbles* and the blurb on the front cover reads: Inside today's issue-two fantastic Valentine stories- and much more! Plus Bril Poster! Further, on one occasion, Alex brought into school a chart the size of a large dining table, which mapped all the different territories and locations in which the superheroes' adventures occurred. This was very carefully drawn and labelled and in its complexity, resembled the maps drawn up by Tolkien for Middle Earth. It was the trio's habit to work out the plotting of their adventure tales by moving their wooden figures round this map, acting out their dialogues.
All three children were proud to discuss their out-of-school writing and it was evident that the production of the comic had a close relationship to each one's emerging sense of self and projected future lives. All three held very positive views of their writing ability and all harboured some desire to develop their interest in later years.

Extraordinary Children?

Of course these Kirklees children's collaborative writing venture is out of the ordinary, but the urge to write collaboratively and in doing so create an imaginary world in itself is not (See, for example, Steedman, 1982). The intensity of their dedication to producing

their magazines and their incorporation of topical reference, alongside that of their playthings is reminiscent of another group of Yorkshire children. The Brontës of Haworth spent their early years at home occupying themselves by composing stories based on popular 'media' figures of their age such as the explorers, Captain Edward Parry and William Ross and the soldiers, Wellington and Napoleon Bonaparte. To these they added characters from children's fables, particularly genii taken from *The Arabian Nights*. They also based stories on a group of small wooden soldiers, purchased for their brother, Branwell, whom they named the Young Men. Thy cut old envelopes and grocery bags into tiny sheets which they then sewed together with blue sugar bags for covers to produce miniaturised editions of their adventures. (Gérin, 1967, p.28). Their publications also included illustrations of their fantastical tales of exploration and adventure set in the miniature kingdom of Gondal and Great Glass Town. The Brontës, like the Kirklees children, were in the habit of enacting their stories before committing them to paper.

What is extraordinary about both sets of young writers and what differentiates them from other such childhood fantasists is not the nature of their ventures but their ability to sustain their creativity over long periods of time, developing complex networks of intertextuality and referencing in writing. Other children interviewed in the Kirklees project have described similar home activities, though not on so large a scale. One boy explained how he developed narratives while playing with his friends on a piece of waste ground near home which had in turn acted as an alien planet, a jungle and a stretch of desert island. Other boys described elaborate narratives constructed at home, using characters from fantasy and computer programmes. It was girls, on the whole, who reported writing more personally in diaries or letters, in a private scene of writing which prepared them for the concentration on individualised production most frequently demanded in Victorian school.

Just as this kind of creativity rarely contributes to the assessments of our current school curriculum, so Charlotte, arguably the most imaginative and certainly the most prolific of the trio of women writers, had her abilities questioned on school entry, despite her early

creativity (she had already written and illustrated her own books). Nineteenth century schooling also placed emphasis on the acquisition of knowledge and the correct use of structures, in much the same way as some current assessments are interpreted to emphasise the surface and organisational features of text. Her headmistress recorded this assessment of her at age eight:

> Reads tolerably -Writes indifferently -Ciphers a little and works neatly-
> Knows nothing of Grammar, Geography, History or Accomplishments-
> Altogether clever of her age but knows nothing systematically.
> (Quoted in Gérin, 1967,p1)

Switching Codes from Home to School

How well then has the Kirklees children's home experience of writing fitted them for school assessments in writing? All three children have maintained an interest in their school written work, as well as their home comic productions and as with the autobiographies, have been enabled to incorporate elements of their personal interests into more school based tasks.

There is already a marked difference between the language Vicki and Anne use for their contributions to the jointly produced comics at home and the language of their schoolwork. Andrew's writing for his school autobiography, on the other hand, remains very much in the comic mode he enjoys most.

> **About Me**
>
> Hi! I am Alex and this is my pet mouse, Scabbers. Our favourite food is cheese. Well, I think you'd expect that from a mouse. Isn't that right Scabbers?
> Hu, you would like to write, Scabbers? well, OK.

> Hi I'm Scabbers and my best friend is …eeh, wot's a best friend?
> Never mind him!
> Any way I have blue eyes and I want psychic powers and I would use them to pick people up and throw them against walls.
> Oh yeah!
> My best friends are Ann, Vick Alex, A. and of course Beaver and Scabbers.

About Me, requires the interaction of text and image to convey its full meaning. Alex's identity, as the producer of meanings, is intimately tied to the integration of words and pictures and with the visual aspects of his texts. Interestingly, he already knows the risk he runs to him self by exposing his interest as a 'writer' to others. When I asked him if he will continue producing the comic when he moves to the local comprehensive school in the following year, he comments that the other boys will perhaps consider him a 'dork' if he continues to do so. It is evident from his hesitations as he talks to me that the work will have to go further underground next year and not be acknowledged as important in class. Perhaps the drawings will be transferred to the covers of exercise books as doodles and graffiti. This was indeed the case with the young Picasso, whose Latin and maths exercise books, displayed in the Picasso Museum in Barcelona, bear doodles of bulls and doves, alongside caricatures of friends and small self-portraits. Perhaps the art curriculum will enable Alex to develop aspects of his visual literacy, but in any case it is likely that the current congruence between school and home creativity will be disrupted.

The girls seem to me to be already quite skilful at negotiating the gap between home and schooled literacies. Anne writes:

> **About Me**
>
> My favourite boy's name is hmmm… Ah! Yes, it's got to be Ben or Felix.
> I like drinking fizzy coca cola with lemon and ice-cubes and chocolate milk shakes-ah lovely!
> My favourite games are rounders where you have to slog the ball and leg it around the posts. I think it's a mega fun game. My second favourite is called Hacky 1,2,3. It's like hide and seek and I love it.
> My favourite animals are seals and turtles. Seals are cute when they move and slap their fins and turtles amazing when they swim.
> My favourite television programme is Pokémon. It's cool when Ash battles with trainers and gym leaders.

I don't like Barbies, Action men, skirts and platforms, dresses and high-heels!
Thank you for listening. Please read on.

Anne's autobiographical piece allows her to position herself against the grain of accepted forms for signifying a female self, the format of her writing and its register are only marginally outside what might be acceptable in an assessed piece. The work of another girl in the same class who also enjoys design and incorporated playful comic elements in her autobiography is probably the clearest example of this ability to switch codes:

My Future Life

In one year's time I will hopefully be doing really well at high school. I will be in the top classes for most things and I will have lots of friends.
In six year's time I hope I will be going to Green Head College or a technical college. I will be studying hard to try and get good qualifications to get a good job.
I will also have a part-time job helping in a shop.
In sixteen years time I will have good A levels in design and art. I will also have learned Japanese and I will be working in Japan. I will be a rich and famous computer designer and I will work for a famous computer company.
I will live in an apartment in Japan and everyone will admire me.
Emily

Her piece illustrates an ability to shape ideas to meet the requirements of the system. Yet the question provoked by her work is just as challenging as any of the debates about boys' disadvantage in current schooling. Does the predisposition of girls like Emily to accept the patterns of reading and writing presented in schools hinder their creative development and individual 'voice' as writers?

In Y6, it is unusual for a teacher to allow so much time for sketching ideas before writing. Given this option Vicki has used a cartoon to plot out her argument for a persuasive piece of writing. Her cartoon shows the head teacher, ensconced in the warmth of his study, with a mug of tea and buns labelled 'staff special teas' to hand He is

casually swinging the whistle which he will blow when he considers it is time to let class 6 in from the playground. A speech bubble reads "Ahh! Just another half hour more." The children are shown outside in a rainstorm, getting drenched, coughing and groaning. The caption reads: 'Y6 aren't a line. there a class' (child's spelling)'

The written work which she has developed from this is in the form of a letter to the headteacher. It reads:

> Dear Mr M.
> I am writing to ask that Y6 should not line up at the start of the day and after break time.
> Firstly, do you know when you were talking about rights in your assembly? I think this should be our most important one because Y6 aren't that keen on lining up. I know you're doing it for us and we respect that, but we say we should be allowed ion because we are more mature.
> A further issue that you should consider is since it is only a few months before we go to the High School and we are lined for the rest of school. Why can't we just walk in sensibly on our own now? A third point I would like to make is that we are nearly in High School and our last year should be the best. And it would show how nice a headmaster you are. Also people come past and say whose class are taking the responsibility coming in.
> I understand that people are concerned we might block the doorway and maybe knock small children down but I think we would set a good example

Vicki is using connectives such as 'firstly,' 'a further issue, 'a third point' which have been introduced as part of a model writing frame for persuasion. Both image and text show a good grasp of persuasive techniques and the cartoon has clearly created a rich context for her writing.

The importance of teacher recognition of home practices

These Kirklees children were fortunate to be part of a classroom where multiple modes of meaning making are valued, encouraged and recognised. This has enabled them to move smoothly between graphic and written formats in a good deal of their schoolwork. There were numerous examples of graphic representations in their science, geography and history books in as well as in their design folders.

This is not always the case in schools and too many older children and working class adults I have interviewed express views of the processes of the schooling they experienced similar to these recounted by Giroux :

> Something stopped us in school. For me, it was like being sent to a strange planet. Teaching was exclusively centred on obscure books and the culture of print...The language we learned and had to speak was different, strange, and unusually verbose...We were on a different train, one oriented towards a cheap imitation of the knowledge of high culture.'
> (Giroux, 1994, Preface ix)

By understanding the social-cultural literacy practices which shape children's personal preferences for communicating meaning and then encouraging their preferred means of doing this, teachers can try to ensure that this knowledge informs their schooled literacy practices. Such an emphasis works to counteract that dislocation between home and schooled literacies documented by other researchers in the past twenty years (Heath, 1983; Luke, 1993, Gee, 1996, Lillis, 2001).

This is not to suggest that the practice of teaching those written genres which have been given high status within society is wrong-headed. Rather, the opposite. As children progress through their schooling they need to be able to identify the most appropriate forms for communicating knowledge within specific subject domains. As Hannon (1995) has pointed out in the conclusion to his study of how literacy might be established through work with preschool children and their families:

> Those of us who value parental involvement in the teaching of literacy face a dilemma. On the one hand we wish to listen and learn from parents, to respect their language, and we do not want uncritically to impose school literacy on families. On the other hand, school literacy is our business and it is self-deceiving to imagine that involvement can mean accepting all families' literacies as a substitute for school literacy. For many families, involvement in the teaching of literacy is bound to mean being involved in new and different forms of literacy.

(Hannon, 1995, p150)

With older children, it is the language and ideas from popular culture that they, themselves, bring to the playground and classroom that need to be attended to and learned from. For no matter how much a teacher may wish to exclude popular cultural influences they have a disconcerting habit of making their presence known (Dyson, 1997, 1999; Marsh and Millard, 2000) As the school-age child progresses through the relentless set formats of an increasingly regulated literacy curriculum (Hilton, 2001) a response by teachers to the dilemma created by the divergence of home and school literacies becomes an even more pressing concern. All children need to be informed explicitly of the dominant forms of literacy employed in acquiring school knowledge if they are to acquire the symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1979) which will ensure that as pupils leave school they have access to a range of employment and leisure. For, as much previous research has shown, without a clear set of targets many pupils and indeed adult writers, remain mystified by the range of responses demanded of them in the general field of school and academic writing, (Sheeran and Barnes, 1992; Webster, Beveridge, and Reed, 1996; Lillis, 2001). Further, many of those who find school literacy or academic writing difficult and therefore who require greatest support to overcome barriers to participation are from less privileged backgrounds However, curricula that are concerned solely with the transmission of powerful adult forms as an end in themselves may result in whole groups of pupils feeling excluded or demotivated. It is preferable that access to a full literacy should be achieved by building on, rather than by denying access in school to home literacy practice and interests. The achievement of such a synthesis depends to a large on each individual teacher's ability to recognise and support personal motivation and creativity. It is also most importantly a question of the assessment systems adopted. The demand for specific measurable outcomes in literacy coupled to clearly defined targets has lead in many cases to a narrowing of the teaching spectrum and teacher's priorities for their pupils. This is well summed up in the report *All Our Futures*, the report of the National Advisory Committee on Creative and Cultural Education

> The problem for creative and cultural education is not the need for assessment, but the nature of it. In practice, the process of assessment itself can determine the priorities of education in general. Our consultation suggest four related problems:
>
> - a growing emphasis on summative assessment
> - the related emphasis on measurable outcomes
> - difficulties of assessing creativity
> - growing pressure of national assessment on teachers and schools.
>
> (NACCCE, 1999, p. 107)

Under such pressure, a focus on the transmission powerfully determined genres may create classroom practices that conform to Brian Street's (1995) definition of an autonomous literacy, a term which he has used to describe an institutional self-perpetuating system that has its own internal consistency as opposed to an ideological literacy that can incorporate social and cultural difference. Not only this but in narrowing the curriculum to a narrowly defined set of competencies we are denying what Kress (1997) has described as 'deep-seated dispositions in the person who is literate.'(1997,p.8). It seems important, therefore, for educationalists and teachers to broaden their understanding of the other forms and patterns of meaning making which are embedded in children's literacy practices out of school. I have therefore turned my gaze on the importance of recognising how children's interaction with each other in school can reveal distinctive patterns in the home environment which mark them out as members of specific sociocultural groups. In a recent paper, Marsh and I have discussed in more detail how boys and girls come to make different uses of drawing in their texts, arguing that school often imposes limitations on pupils' opportunities to construct meaning in anything other than through words on the page. Elsewhere, we have described the low esteem in which both pictures and the design elements of writing may be held in school suggesting that visual literacy is rarely given status in school and that teachers largely regard the movement from pictures to words as one of intellectual advance in which drawing need to be left behind in the earliest stages of schooling (Marsh and Millard, 20001b).

The response of teachers involved in the Kirklees project to these findings has been to focus on what children bring of themselves to the scene of writing and to incorporate

in their planning, opportunities for different modes of meaning making which include drama, graphic representation and the exploration of 'creative' or 'poetic' writing forms within the framework. The next stage of the project will report on the effectiveness of the strategies they adopt. Meanwhile, though sentence and level objectives remain a helpful support to teacher knowledge and the development of pupils' understanding, teachers need also to concentrate on creating rich opportunities where their pupils' make meaning that has import for themselves and their peers, as well as for those who teach or assess them.

To return to the three subjects of this study, Alex, Vicki and Anne have powerful reasons for using pictures and cartoon formats in their work. Just as the Brontës before them they have used their private world of play to establish their own identities as writers and creators. Luckily for this trio, their teacher is sensitive to their and their classmates' semiotic dispositions and communicative styles and allows therefore a smooth transfer of interests from home to school.

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